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AUTHOR Evenbeck, Scott E.; Foster, Mary C.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes efforts by Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to develop programs to serve the needs of first-year students, focusing on collaborative efforts across the university system to retain nontraditional and underrepresented students. The School of Liberal Arts Faculty Mentor Program links a first-year seminar course with introductory courses in various disciplines, placing faculty members on instructional teams that include students, librarians, academic advisors, and media specialists. The program is designed to identify implications for curriculum development and faculty development needs; to recommend improvements in undergraduate instruction; to suggest revision of materials designed for students new to IUPUI; to develop models for improved advising; to define the role of student mentors; to develop closer links between the library and faculty; and to develop an understanding of the technological needs of faculty and students. The development of these instructional teams with IUPUI's first-year courses are central to the process of restructuring the university to meet the changing needs and characteristics of students. (MDM)

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The Urban University First Year Experience: Building Community Benefits Faculty and Other University Professionals and Serves Students Well

Scott E. Evenbeck and Mary C. Foster

I. INTRODUCTION

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is an urban university. Urban universities are committed to research, teaching and service but also offer a wider range of pre-professional and professional degree programs than is typical on traditional campuses in the United States. IUPUI, along with other urban universities, has as its mission a commitment to serving the needs of students in its community, many of whom are traditionally under-represented in academia--including part-time and, often, older students who are returning to school to upgrade their job skills or to participate in professional training, low income and first generation college students, and minority populations.

Thus, the campus has a particular responsibility to address the needs of students who come to the university underprepared in some way. In a context where many students feel isolated and alienated from the academic culture, restructuring efforts that allow for the development of personal connections between faculty in the departments and beginning students can be very powerful. If, in addition, the restructuring efforts bring together faculty, academic advisors, university librarians, information technology professionals, and student mentors in collaborative settings, it also becomes possible to break down the isolation and alienation that exists within the academy itself.

Beginning students at large universities are most vulnerable to failure because they do not perceive themselves to be part of an academic department nor to be connected in other ways to the university. These undergraduates require particular attention regardless of admission status and levels of academic preparation. New models, however, must be developed which take advantage of the expertise of professional staff in all areas of the university who have responsibility for addressing the needs of undergraduate students.

The IUPUI Undergraduate Education Center (UEC), a centralized academic advising unit, has developed programs and services to help new students at the university strengthen reading, writing and math skills, learn how to study in college, and learn what will be required of them in order to make progress toward graduation. Many of the UEC initiatives have focused on strategies for linking the work of the academic advisors in the

UEC with the work of the faculty in the colleges. Learning Communities, for example, provide a structure for linking a study skills or a writing course with an introductory level course in a discipline such as Psychology or Anthropology. UEC advisors, university instructors, and student mentors work within the learning communities to help students meet the expectations of the discipline-based courses while providing a context for academic support services. When departmental faculty are involved in such programs, the retention of students improves greatly. When only advisors and part time faculty interact with first semester students, the retention rates remain fairly constant. The connection to departmental faculty is critical; the opportunity for beginning students to interact, in an instructional context as well as in a personal context, with full time faculty who are committed to student success is also very important.

In developing the first year experience program, the campus built on the concept of learning communities and focused on the development of teams of faculty, advisors and student mentors and on removing the barriers that exist between instruction and support services. The key to discovering how best to help students thrive at the university is the development of close links between new students and the faculty and staff who will be responsible for ensuring that they graduate from the university.

The faculty in the program who have worked closely with other professionals to help students get connected with the university community and begin using its resources, have made their teaching a "public activity"--opening their classrooms to advisors and student mentors, bringing in resource staff from the writing center, from the computer clusters, and from external agencies. In addition, they have become student advocates and are working within the university to strengthen programs and resources, revise policies and procedures, and improve services.

Individual faculty members cannot use the full resources of the university if they remain isolated in planning and implementing first year courses. The complexity and mushrooming opportunities of informational and technological resources can overwhelm professors as well as students. Additionally, academic planning, particularly for first generation students and students of non-traditional age, is difficult to oversee without the assistance of professional advisors.

Instructional teams that include faculty, students, librarians, academic advisors, and media specialists incorporate multiple areas of expertise in the university in a new mode of curriculum development that is responsive to the ways that knowledge is now produced and shared. This coalition of partners ensures that the courses developed will offer students all the available resources for learning in the university.

II. THE CAMPUS AND ITS STUDENTS

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is Indiana's third largest campus, located in Indiana's capital and the focal point for much of the state's social, economic, governmental, and cultural activities. IUPUI, formed from a consolidation of Indiana University and Purdue University programs in the capital city in 1969, is Central Indiana's public university. Without a community college system, the smaller campuses of Indiana University and Purdue University perform the community college function. Indiana's political and education leadership is very much concerned with the low college-going rate and with the very low rate of baccalaureate degree holders among its citizens over age 25; yet the presence of regional campuses in the population centers of the state may, in the end, serve to provide the setting for new and more effective means of providing both educational access and excellence as students move through these four-year institutions.

IUPUI is designated as Indiana's urban university, recognizing not only its very large enrollment but also its wide-ranging educational offerings and its diverse student body. IUPUI offers the most comprehensive array of educational degree programs in Indiana--due to its providing both Indiana and Purdue degrees. The campus enrolls the largest number of post-baccalaureate professional degree students in Indiana, being the home of the state's only medical and dental schools as well as its urban public law school and offering a wide array of other graduate and professional programs. At the same time, IUPUI has long fulfilled the community college mission for Central Indiana providing nearly "open" admission to the citizens of Central Indiana, representing 1 in 4 of Hoosier citizens.

The campus did not develop from a core of traditional arts and sciences programs nor from a community college. IUPUI is the consolidation of 17 schools, primarily professional, some once proprietary. IUPUI's very large enrollment developed as a function of its location in the center of Indianapolis, on a "model" urban campus master-designed by Edward Larabee Barnes, and from its long provision of outreach programming (e.g., Weekend College and Learn and Shop) and its heritage of offering evening classes not set apart from the day classes. The campus has attracted a cadre of outstanding faculty whose scholarly commitments have served it well resulting in significant increases in research productivity, including sponsored research, as well as appropriate additions to the graduate programs. With funding never keeping pace with increases in enrollments, many faculty have not been involved with the entering students who are served more often than not by associate faculty.

IUPUI's entering student population is drawn largely from Indiana and, specifically, the city of Indianapolis. Many students fit the definition of the nontraditional student: they are older, they work full or part-time, and they are the first in their families to go to college. Fewer than 1% of these students live on campus. Minorities make up over 13% of the entering student population: African Americans, 9.9%; Native Americans, 0.2%; Asians or Pacific Islanders, 1.6%; Hispanics, 1.4% (Fall 1995 Student Profile, IMIR, November 8, 1995).

These diverse students, juggling multiple and often competing demands and obligations, often enter higher education with the goal of becoming prepared for a secure, well-paying job in order to support families as well as themselves. Their high-school experiences have taught them to enter a post-secondary experience so that they can earn credits, as opposed to gaining knowledge, and thus become qualified for better jobs in business and industry. These characteristics in conjunction with other academic weaknesses can prevent student success at the undergraduate level.

First-generation college students are particularly at risk in large urban institutions such as IUPUI. There are not always clear "road maps" to help the naive student understand expectations for performance in the classroom and requirements that must be met in order to earn a degree. In addition, lower division students are often not identified with a particular department or school. When students begin their academic work as preparatory students at IUPUI, for example, they may work only with adjunct faculty or lecturers and will not have the opportunity to study with faculty who are part of a university department. Even students who meet regular admissions criteria and are admitted to the Undergraduate Education Center, an advising and academic support unit, to complete lower division requirements before being admitted to a particular school in the university may not have the opportunity to work with full-time faculty since many lower division courses are taught by lecturers and graduate assistants. New undergraduates at IUPUI are a particularly vulnerable group; with the 1993 cohort, for example, 76% persisted to the second semester (as opposed to 84% in the university system as a whole) and only 57% persisted to the third semester (compared to 68% in the university system). These undergraduates are most vulnerable to failure often because they do not perceive themselves to be part of an academic department, nor to be at all connected to the university. New students at the university require particular attention regardless of admission status and levels of academic preparation.

Much of IUPUI's work with entering students has centered on the Involvement in Learning report issued a decade ago, but still current and helpful. The three guiding principles for the report are (1)

defining and supporting high expectations, (2) involving students in their learning, and (3) providing assessment and feedback. IUPUI's Commitment to Academic Excellence "sets the stage" for defining high expectations. (see Appendix).

IUPUI began a supplemental instruction program in 1991 as a means of involving students with one another and with their learning, an initiative meant to build upon the work of Richard Light, Uri Treisman, and others who have stressed the importance of student collaborative learning outside the classroom as central to student academic success. This paper describes a systematic program of strong faculty involvement in and leadership with the program, coupled with the implementation of instructional teams, as the primary means of strengthening involvement in learning.

The third factor, assessment and feedback, is important not only as a function of accountability but also as the understanding that the clear articulation of institutional mission must be accompanied by assessment of implementation of that mission. Assessment and feedback is important at the institutional level and at the level of the student. For example, entering students sometimes do not have a clear picture of how well they're doing. IUPUI continues with its midterm grades but has also added an "early warning system" whereby faculty inform academic advisors within the first four weeks of class if there's an issue that requires attention with a student.

III. THE LIBERAL ARTS MENTORS AND INSTRUCTIONAL TEAMS

Comprehensive academic support services are necessary to help all students meet high academic expectations. Such services, however, cannot be effective unless they are linked directly to the work of the faculty. The School of Liberal Arts Faculty Mentor Program provides a means of structuring the university environment for small groups of students in ways which provide for the linking of faculty with other university professionals in the service of students and which allow for the development of personal connections between faculty in the departments and new students. New models are needed in the academy; the work of faculty and staff must be restructured in order to better address the needs of beginning students. In order to be effective, any new structures that evolve must be such that they enable students to understand the culture of the academy and to learn how to utilize resources within the university community that will support and sustain them as they work to complete their studies.

IUPUI has developed the Faculty Mentor program to provide for the intense involvement --both formally and informally--of full-time faculty with entering students. The program links a first year seminar course with introductory courses in the disciplines and places the faculty members on instructional teams that are designed to bring university professionals together in support of entering students. This effort provides direct service to students who participate in the mentoring program; in addition, it provides invaluable experiential data to the faculty about IUPUI students--particularly beginning students--and about the resources that are available to help students become successful at the university.

Since most of a student's life on a commuter campus is spent within the classroom, a program which links full-time faculty-as-mentors, academic advisors, and student mentors as members of an instructional team for beginning students offers a powerful model for supporting new students. When the instruction teams include university librarians and technology support staff, faculty and students alike benefit greatly.

The first-year seminars are credit bearing courses which, if successful, will be required of entering students at IUPUI. Focus in the developmental phase is on learning (1) how to assess and respond to student needs and expectations, (2) how the instructional teams develop and operate, and (3) how to refine the design of the course and support structures so as to offer the course to all incoming students. An important part of the implementation of the course is a focus on reflective practice--looking at the characteristics of new students and reflecting on the process of serving them well. The ultimate goal is the transformation of the undergraduate experience at IUPUI. Examining the process of learning to be student-centered in our instructional practices as well as in our support services and being intentional about facilitating student achievement and student success is the first step toward that goal.

Instructional teams that include faculty, students, librarians, academic advisors, and media specialists incorporate multiple areas of expertise in the university in a new mode of curriculum development that is responsive to the ways that knowledge is now produced and shared. This coalition of partners helps to ensure that the courses developed offer students all the available resources for learning in the university. Instructional teams develop first-year seminar courses using the disciplinary and pedagogical expertise of discipline faculty, the learning experiences of students, the informational access expertise of university librarians, the knowledge and experience of academic advisors, and the technological abilities of multimedia professionals. The effects of working together in teams impacts every member of the team. Following are some of the actual and anticipated results of the formal and informal work of these teams.

Faculty Participants: Working as part of an instructional team, faculty have developed and implemented courses designed to introduce students to the process of scholarly work in the context of the faculty member's own discipline as well as to the process of becoming a part of the university community. The faculty provide instruction as well as guidance and have designed structured activities to help students learn how to become successful. The impact of this collaborative work (1) *affects curriculum in other courses the mentoring faculty are teaching*, (2) *develops an awareness of faculty development needs*, and (3) *leads to an understanding of the needs of undergraduate learners*, particularly new students in the university.

1. ***Identification of implications for curriculum development.*** The instructional teams offer an innovative structure for curriculum development. Faculty members have the advantage of working with a team of professionals and develop expertise in the instruction and support of first-year students. As a result of working with other university professionals faculty begin to look for instructional strategies that are most effective in helping students build community, interact effectively with other faculty, work collaboratively with others, utilize university resources, and become successful students. The involvement of faculty members who are committed to the task of introducing new students to the university and teaching them how to excel in their discipline as well as in the university as a whole will necessarily impact the work of the departments and influence the way the curriculum is envisioned by these faculty members. The faculty have excellent information for their departments regarding student needs as well as student expectations and make recommendations to their departments regarding curriculum development needs.

2. ***Identification of faculty development needs***. New faculty participants will participate in workshops or seminars developed by experienced faculty mentors. These workshops will focus on the needs of new students, particularly in urban, commuter colleges and universities, and on the identification of instructional strategies which have been most effective in helping students to learn to work collaboratively and to excel in their academic work. In addition, bi-weekly planning and evaluation meetings of the instructional teams will focus on particular areas of need that the faculty and staff identify. Faculty recommendations for continued professional development are reported to their departments.

3. ***Recommendations for the improvement of the teaching of undergraduates.*** Evaluation over three to four years of the development and implementation of the first year seminars and the process of mentoring undergraduates--especially first-year students--will provide a structure for assessing the efficacy of efforts to improve the success and retention of new students. The Undergraduate Education Center and the

Council on Undergraduate Learning subcommittee on first-year seminars at IUPUI view this project as one means of examining "standards of excellence in teaching, research, creative work, and service," and "determining new patterns of academic work by faculty and staff" which are priorities for strategic planning on the campus. It is also expected that the evaluation process will yield information on how teaching and research can be linked when teaching undergraduates is the priority.

Academic Advisors: Working as part of the instructional teams, academic advisors also participate in the bi-weekly planning and evaluation meetings and contribute to the reflective process. The advisors work with students individually and in groups, identifying student needs, assisting students in developing their educational plans and facilitating community building. Expected outcomes include the following. The impact of their collaboration with faculty and focused work with groups of students will result in (1) *the revision of educational materials developed for lower division students at the university*, and (2) the development of models for providing improved advising services.

1. ***The revision of materials designed for students new to IUPUI***. With better knowledge of student needs and with specific suggestions from students about how to communicate information to new students, the advisors will understand how to present information on such topics as the advising process, planning for transfers to degree-granting units, career planning, and financial aid more effectively.

2. ***The development of models for providing improved advising services*** will also evolve as academic advisors become involved with students in an instructional context over the period of a semester. The student mentors on the instructional teams have begun to develop leadership skills and, in future semesters, may take on the role of peer advisors. The advisors themselves have developed a clearer understanding of faculty roles and, as a consequence, have begun to develop links in the schools. A variety of models for advising, many of them building on the group processes that undergird the program, will eventually replace the one-on-one advising that is currently the norm.

Student Mentors: Student mentors act as liaisons between the faculty and the students and often take responsibility for making classroom presentations and facilitating group discussions. The expected results of the work of the student mentors are twofold: (1) the mentors themselves will learn to be excellent students and will be more likely to remain at the university, and (2) the mentors will contribute to the improvement of the first-year seminars by assisting in the planning and evaluation of activities.

1. **The mentors will learn to be excellent students and will remain at the university.** The fact that many of the mentors had been students in the seminars the semester before they mentored a new group was helpful in that the student mentors were sensitive to students' problems and concerns. The mentors reported that it was helpful for them to know that they were able to "help someone succeed," and that they were learning more about themselves through their participation on the instructional teams. One student commented that he had learned valuable information from the class and, by working on similar issues with many different students, he observed patterns in himself and realized that his problem-solving skills were improving. Others reported that they had gained confidence in themselves after the experience of getting to know how professors feel, "seeing the other side of the desk," as well as from making presentations in class, contacting students by phone, and interacting with the counselors.

2. **The mentors will contribute to the improvement of the first year-seminars** by assisting in the planning and evaluation of activities. Feedback from the student mentors has helped the faculty plan activities that are useful for new students.

University Librarians: Working as part of an instructional team, university librarians will participate in program planning and ongoing evaluation activities and will work with groups of students, identifying student needs, and introducing them to the use of the library and learning resources. The librarians will also collaborate with faculty in the development of assignments and group projects which will provide students with experience in accessing, delimiting, and processing information. It is expected that this collaboration will impact the professional development of the librarians in much the same way that the professional development of instructional faculty has been affected. It is difficult to continue to approach students in traditional ways after working closely with several groups of very non-traditional students. Specifically, the expectation is that the librarians' work on the instructional teams will lead to the following:

1. **Development of improved curriculum** for library instruction based on student needs and levels of experience with on-line library systems and the use of information resources.
2. **Development of closer links** between the university library and classroom faculty.
3. **Revision of instructional materials** designed to introduce beginning students to the use of the library system.

Integrated Technologies Staff: Working as part of the instructional teams, staff from Integrated Technologies will participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of activities which introduce

students, faculty and advisors to the use of technology on campus. It is expected that this collaboration will lead to better understanding of the information needs of faculty as well as those of students and that the technology staff will learn ways of improving service to new students at the university. Through their work with individuals and small groups of students in the first-year seminars, the technology staff will have the opportunity (1) *to learn what students (and faculty) need to know in order to ensure better access to technology on campus* and (2) *to test out new strategies for instructing naive learners*.

1. **Understanding the needs of faculty and students.** As technology becomes more integrated with everything that happens on a campus, the technical professionals will need to become more aware of the needs of the users of all technology. Working closely with groups of students over several semesters will enable the technical staff to learn how best to communicate and instruct their clients. After only one semester faculty have asked for more information about access to computers, explanation of procedures for using open labs as classrooms, and more comprehensive instruction for students who come to the university with no prior experience with computer technology.

2. **Revision of instructional strategies and materials** designed to introduce naive students to the use of instructional technologies--in much the same ways that curriculum will be revised in the academic classroom

We note that this project is designed to improve instruction and academic support services for students. The expected outcomes for students include the following:

- Higher rates of academic achievement and persistence at the university as compared to comparable groups who do not participate in this program.
- Higher graduation rates over the long term (the first group will be compared with other, comparable students in their cohort group in 2003 to determine whether 6 year graduation rates are improved).
- Improved awareness and utilization of campus resources, including support services.
- Increased awareness of personal interests, abilities and values.
- Improved student satisfaction with advising services and overall satisfaction with their university experience.
- Increased use of technology resources to serve instruction and improve student learning. Increased student use of technology on campus including the use of computer clusters and the Teaching and Learning Center to access e-mail, participate on listserves and discussion groups, and utilize word processing and on-line library services.

IV. CONCLUSION

In "Reconstructing the First Year of College for Student Success," Vincent Tinto reports that "most retention programs have done little to change the essential quality of the academic experience for most students, especially during the critical first year of college"(a manuscript to be published in *Planning for Higher Education*, Fall 1996). He believes a primary factor in this lack of success is that "most retention programs are largely non-academic in nature." He states that "faculty should become more actively involved in retention efforts; and retention programs should include initiatives that change the everyday academic experience of students, especially during the critical first year. (This is especially urgent for commuter students since classrooms and laboratories are often the only places where commuters actively engage with faculty and other students.) He notes particularly that

> academic planners need to direct their attention to a major reconstruction of the learning settings that mark campus life, especially during the foundational first year of college. The question they must ask is not what programs are needed to retain students, but how the learning settings of that year should be constructed so as to promote student education in that year and beyond.

The development of instructional teams with IUPUI's first-year courses are central to the process of restructuring the institution to meet the changing needs and characteristics of students. Faculty, academic advisors, librarians, student mentors, and technical personnel work together to build on the campus orientation program in providing a transitional course, often linked with other courses in learning communities, as a means of providing coordinated support to entering students, a seamless web of programs and academic support.

The participation of each member of the instructional team provides explicit and implicit connections to persons and programs on campus that will continue as important resources for the entering students. For example, the presence of the student mentor provides a "bridge" to the supplemental instruction programs, now offered in a majority of the high risk courses at the introductory level. The active involvement of the librarian and of the technical support personnel makes use of these resources "natural" for the student. Most important, the involvement of the faculty provides students with close personal connections with the essence of the university. Faculty work and faculty behaviors and faculty expectations define the university. The faculty can "demystify" the campus, the faculty can share the excitement of learning, and the faculty can introduce entering students to the academy in ways that others on campus can only talk about.

IUPUI began its work with the Liberal Arts Faculty Mentors in 1995-1996 and will fully pilot the instructional teams in 1996-1997. There are important questions of faculty roles and rewards as well as questions of the impact of student achievement and persistence which will be addressed. Anecdotal reports and preliminary data suggest that there has already been significant transformation. Yet, there have been some significant "learnings" for the campus. Among these are the following:

1. We cannot "do business" as we have in the past. The student achievement and persistence rates are unacceptably low and preclude our continuing to serve students through traditional means. As faculty have become more informed on entering students' experiences, they have been key partners in articulating their perceptions of the level of service provided to students. To an increasing degree, these efforts are making the University's work with the students both inside and outside the classroom "public activities." It is important that each unit articulate its policies and procedures, linking them together in a seamless web of support to the students, rather than have challenging situations being dealt with only by individual students or known only by a small cadre of advisors serving the entering students,. To some extent this program brings the university to the classroom. Students on an urban campus face difficult decisions regarding their use of time. They do go to class, for the most part. Thus, focusing university resources on the classroom through instructional teams and leading students to continue working together outside the classroom provides a strong transition for entering students.
2. What we do with the entering students must be intentional. Part of the recognition that we cannot simply continue with past policies and practices is the realization that we are in fact "on automatic pilot." We run the risk of reiterating, reinforcing and repeating past practices which we may well no longer value if we are not very careful to be intentional in our service to students.
3. What we do must be informed by reflection. The faculty mentors meet together regularly. Their commitment to the students and the students' success is the context for the gatherings. Just as reflection has been identified as the key element in service learning, reflection is the key element in working with the entering students not only in identifying what we are doing but also in informing our mutual efforts for improvements.
4. Faculty in a university with a successful and increasing program of research and service must be supported in their efforts to work with entering students. Defining faculty participation as an "add-on" to other responsibilities will not result in success. Faculty are learning new ways to work with a new population of students. Rather than concentrating their efforts only on their majors, faculty are taking responsibility for all entering students. This is a new task, one that requires faculty working together with

one another to define, describe, assess, and revise appropriate strategies. And, such innovation cannot occur without significant allocation of resources.

5. Effective implementation of this program must incorporate what we are learning about changes in modern society in general. Teaching is no longer a solitary activity. Advising is no longer a solitary activity. Persons must learn to collaborate--to do their work in a fundamentally different way--if students are going to be successful. The use of technology is central to our efforts. Students and members of the teams working with them use e-mail and computer-based systems to conduct and to assess our programs. Technical competence is not something that can be delayed. It must, instead, be at the very beginning as teams work together to serve students.
6. Student involvement must be central to our work. IUPUI has implemented an extensive program of supplemental instruction to serve students in lower division courses. This student-run program is the primary component of IUPUI increasing student involvement in learning. The creativity, dedication, and the enthusiasm of students as mentors brings a dimension which is essential to increasing student achievement and persistence.
7. Innovation must become an ongoing feature of the campus. We are never going to "get it just right." Several years ago, Richard Light highlighted the importance of having the university be an "experimenting place." We must keep our focus on assessment, coupled with intentional action and reflection, as we continue to develop these programs. Changing circumstances of students and changing conditions on the campus make it important that we recognize, and even celebrate, the constantly evolving programs and strategies that will be needed for success. At the same time, we must continue to focus our efforts on the academic process as the "center." Our programs "have life" only as they wrap around the student's learning in the classroom. There is no merit in programming that is "off in a corner" and not integral to the faculty, the disciplines and the campus mission of supporting student learning.

Reflections, questions, and comments on this paper and on our work are invited, as are requests for additional data. Please address inquiries to:

Scott Evenbeck
Undergraduate Education Center,
620 Union Drive, UN 245
Indianapolis, IN 46202-5171
Phone: 317/274-5032 FAX: 317/278-2216
e-mail: evenbeck@iupui.edu

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